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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 004679

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT OF DOMINICAN LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER ALFREDO
PACHECO OUTLINES AGENDA

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 4249

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On August 27 newly elected activist Chamber of Deputies President Alfredo Pacheco told Charge d'Affaires and Poloffs he sets a priority on reforming the Penal and Civil Codes. He emphasized ongoing collaboration with new Senate President Jesus Vasquez to develop a joint legislative agenda to be formally announced soon. He expects Congressman Ramon Radhames Garcia to renounce parliamentary immunity in connection with trafficking charges but is unclear on next steps if Garcia does not act. The Chamber's new session officially began August 19 (three days behind schedule) after a disorderly effort by rival Rafaela & Lila Alburquerque and her supporters to prevent Pacheco from assuming leadership (reftel). Pacheco has now taken the helm of what is probably the stronger house of the National Congress and is setting his own course. A coalition-builder, Pacheco strongly supports modernizing and institutionalizing the Congress. END SUMMARY.

NEW LEADERSHIP MEET AND GREET

2. (SBU) On August 27 new Chamber of Deputies President Alfredo Pacheco discussed legislative priorities with Charge d'Affaires and Poloffs. He was accompanied by the other principal officers of the house Vice-President Manuel Sanchez (PRD); Committee on Foreign Relations President Cristian Paredes; Ilana Neumann, Deputy representing Puerto Plata (PRD); and Nemesia de la Cruz, Deputy representing Santo Domingo (PRD). Pacheco began by expressing his support for female politicians (there are 24 women among 150 deputies) and the potential influence Charge could have in promoting more female participation in government. He said that although the Chamber's leadership team is PRD, their views differ concerning presidential candidates. Pacheco also acknowledged opponent Lila Alburquerque's instrumental role in promoting respect for female politicians. He credited her for pushing for key legislation that protects women's rights, such as the recently passed law against trafficking in persons.

3. (SBU) Pacheco told Charge that he and Senate President Vasquez have consulted and will continue to develop a joint legislative agenda. He mentioned as probable priorities reform of Civil and Penal Codes, legislation to equalize rent prices and protect property owners, and follow-up on a law that would institutionalize a human rights ombudsman (Defensor del Pueblo). Pacheco is keen on free trade and globalization. He strongly supports a free trade agreement and concurred with Charge's idea that future congressional delegations include meetings at the Chamber.

WHAT ABOUT RADHAMES GARCIA?

4. (SBU) When asked about his public urging that accused alien smuggler Ramon Radhames Garcia renounce his parliamentary immunity, Pacheco told the Charge that the Chamber has not yet received any written communication from Garcia. He commented that the Dominican constitution is vague about the procedures for revoking immunity of an accused public official but said he would act following receipt of Garcia's written statement. Pacheco reiterated that ultimately the judiciary has to decide Garcia's guilt or innocence. He said that public officials -- like other persons -- are not above the law and should be prosecuted for criminal offenses. The Charge stressed that the U.S. view that the Dominican government has been weak on punishing its own and that failure to prosecute corrupt officials could adversely affect our bilateral relationship.

COMMENT

5. (SBU) Pacheco comes across as an impressively thoughtful and articulate politician. It is too early to tell whether he can deliver on legislation, but he is off to a fast start. He has already begun cleaning house, closing down several departments within the Chamber of Deputies which he deemed unnecessary. As many as 300 low-level political appointees will lose their jobs as a result of the sweep, and will likely be replaced by Pacheco's own supporters.

16. (SBU) As for the hard-fought campaign to win the Chamber presidency, it remains unclear whether Pacheco was involved in orchestrating the blackout and noisy demonstrations on August 16 (his supporters showed up for the session with flashlights). Embassy will continue developing relations with Pacheco and covering significant developments regarding alleged alien smuggler Radhames Garcia.

BIO NOTE

17. (SBU) A well-established PRD leader in the Congress, Alfredo Pacheco has a strong political base in his home neighborhood Cristo Rey (a poor barrio in Santo Domingo). From a very young age Pacheco got involved in politics through community service with the Catholic Church and as a volunteer political activist. He is well liked by his Congressional colleagues and by the general public. Most Dominicans, weary of his predecessor's four-year reign as speaker, seem willing to give him a fair chance to usher in legislative change.

18. (SBU) Pacheco is a long-time public servant who has worked his way up through the ranks. At age 44, he has 13 years in the Chamber along with prior experience as a city councilman, local-level PRD spokesman, and PRD Chamber spokesman. He has already published a booklet about the House of Representatives, with a brief summary of major constitutional reforms, an explanation of the composition of the House, a directory of representatives with personal addresses and birth dates, and a list of proposed legislative 2003-04 agenda items.

KUBISKE